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WASHINGTON, DC—U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) today was invited to the National Defense University in Washington, DC to participate in Global Tempest a Pandemic Influenza War Game. The exercise provided a forum to assess the range of policy options available to the United States in responding to an outbreak of pandemic influenza. DeFazio, a senior member of the House Homeland Security Committee, returned with a sobering view of the nation's preparedness for a pandemic.

"The president and the Congress are not doing enough to prepare for the looming pandemic," said DeFazio. "Experts agree that an influenza pandemic is inevitable, the question is how bad it will be and what form it will take-H5N1, Sars or another strain altogether. It's clear, however that we can take concrete steps to be prepared, and to date, very little is being done."

Lieutenant General Michael Dunn, USAF, President of National Defense University welcomed the participants and Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England opened the exercise. Participants included 10 Members of Congress and senior Executive Branch officials.

"Just like protecting against the nuclear threat from the Soviet Union, we need to be prepared for this crisis," continued DeFazio. "We need state-of-the-art vaccine and antiviral production capacity to produce and stockpile antiviral medication, and we can't wait on the pharmaceutical industry to do it when it is in their interest."

The exercise examined responses to the emergence of a potential pandemic flu strain overseas, the presentation of the first cases in the U.S. and its eventual development into a full blown pandemic worldwide and within America. Participants discussed the nation's pandemic preparedness, communication, surveillance, and detection capability as well as its response and containment capabilities.